

## **Fertilizer rule now in effect in Florida**

Florida has more than 5 million acres of turfgrass under cultivation. Some people believe that most turfgrass should be eliminated because it depletes water resources, and that fertilizing turfgrass causes pollution.

Turfgrass can deplete water resources and pollute if it is mismanaged. But lawns and golf courses actually replenish and recharge our groundwater and clean our urban environment in the wake of storm-water runoff. Turfgrass also cools, replenishes oxygen, reduces heat and acts as a firebreak around homes surrounded by woods.

Fertilizer pollution is caused by incorrect application, such as excessive amounts or applying right before a heavy rainfall. Many studies have shown that when fertilizer is properly applied, almost all of it will be taken up by turf. Fertilizer granules left on sidewalks or driveways can travel down storm drains and into the nearest body of water.

### **Statewide Rule**

A new state rule was developed with direct input from scientists at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. The rule was designed to reduce the amount of phosphorus (designated as P) and nitrogen (designated as N) that homeowners apply to their lawns. It is important to remember that this rule applies only to fertilizer labeling and marketing. There is no enforcement related to product use.

The rule specifically limits the amount of phosphorus that can be applied to urban turf. It can be applied to 0.25 lbs. of P per 1,000 square feet for any single application and 0.50 lbs. of P per 1,000 square feet annually. Due to the low P requirement of turfgrass and the availability of P in our Panhandle soils, this should not be a problem for lawn maintenance.

The rule also states that the use of N will be covered in the fact sheet "Figuring out Fertilizer for the Home Lawn" (ENH962). It lists the recommended annual N rates for various lawn grass species, and it is available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> or <http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Newly planted turf areas, which have the greatest leaching losses of fertilizer, have 12 months to become established before the rule applies to them.

A soil test can determine if you need to apply P, and if so, how much. Kits are available free at the UF/IFAS Bay County Extension office, 647 Jenks Ave., Suite A in Panama City.

*Source: Fertilizer Ordinance and Phosphorus Rule Update, Laurie E. Trenholm, associate professor and urban turfgrass specialist, environmental horticulture, UF/IFAS.*